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Mr. *WOLLASTON*'s

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Notion of Moral G O O D and
E V I L;

In Answer to a

L E T T E R,

By the Rev^d Thomas Bott,
IN WHICH

It is said to be Considered and Refuted.

Magna est Veritas, & praevalabit.



L O N D O N:

Printed for JOEL STEPHENS, at the *Hand and Star* between
the two *Temple Gates* in *Fleetstreet*. M. DCC. XXV. *in June.*

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A
D E F E N C E

Mr. WOLASTON'S

Notion of Moral GOOD and

EVIL;

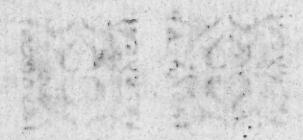
In Answer to a

L E T T E R

IN WHICH

It is said to be Considered and Refuted.

By JOHN G. BURTON



L O N D O N

Printed for J. G. BURTON, at the House and Shop, in the Strand, near the Theatre Royal, in the Year 1791.



A
D E F E N C E
O F

*Mr. Wollaston's Notion of Moral
Good and Evil, &c.*



S the general bent to Reasoning in a way more clear and solid than that which discovers itself in the Writers of former Ages, may well be thought the distinguishing Happiness of *this*; among the many eminent in this way, no Man I think, has of late, made a more handsome Appearance, than the Author of *The Religion of Nature delineated*. That Gentleman's Penetration and reach of Thought, his Sagacity in establishing any particular Truths, the strict Connexion of his Thoughts, and the Justness of his Conclusions, will, in all Probability, render his, one of the first Names in the new *Manner* of Reasoning. I cou'd with much Pleasure enter into a more particular Account of the several Beauties of his Work; what Improvements he has made on old Arguments, and what new ones he has introduced: but my present Design confines me to the considering one single Point in that excellent Treatise, *viz.* The Rule he proposes to distinguish our moral Actions; a Point, that seems to me, to be very much misrepresented by a late Pamphlet, in the Title Page of which, this *Notion* of Mr. *Wollaston* is said, (I think verily with equal Truth and Modesty) to be *Consider'd and Refuted*.

Whether this *Notion* of Mr. *Wollaston* be absolutely right, whether a Point so often and variously attempted, be at length happily hit upon and fix'd to its true and proper Criterion, I shall not take upon me to determine. Thus much, perhaps, might safely be said, that his Rule, upon thoroughly considering it, will appear as just, intelligible, and practicable, as any other yet propos'd; but this at present is not the Question. All that I

shall undertake to shew, is, that it is not refuted, nor at all affected by any thing advanc'd in that Piece, in which it is so gallantly affirmed to be Consider'd and Refuted.

It is a very great Unhappiness to the learned World, that Mr. *Wollaston* did not make his appearance sooner, or continue longer in it. Had he lived to have seen what Objections might be rais'd against any thing advanced in his *Religion of Nature*, I am persuaded we should have seen it either handsomely defended, or (if truth requir'd) more handsomely given up as an Error. But since the loss of him has left his Book without any Defence from the proper quarter, I may be the more readily excus'd for this Endeavour, of shewing part of the Respect I owe to Truth and that great Man.

The surest Method of defending what Mr. *Wollaston* has propos'd, against the present Attack, I take to be the laying down fairly what he has propos'd. Possibly his Notion wants only to be *understood*, that it may be received.

In the beginning of his excellent Treatise on the Religion of Nature, As the *a* Foundation of such Religion lies in that natural Difference between the *a* Acts of Men, which distinguishes them into good, evil, and indifferent; the Author endeavours in the first place to fix a *a* Rule by which we may try our Actions, and find whether they are good, evil, or indifferent. Truth is what he proposes as this Rule, and to shew that it is a proper Rule, he proves *c* *ibid.* by that every *c* Act of an intelligent Free-Being, and all those *c* Omissions which Proposition, 4, interfere with Truth, are *c* morally Evil: that the *y* forbearing such Acts, 5. compared and the acting in opposition to such Omissions, are *y* morally Good: It follows, that when any thing may be done, or not done equally without the 1. violation of Truth, that thing is indifferent.

y by Proposition, 7. compared with 8. Sect. 1. By the Author's way of proceeding to shew that there is such a thing as Natural Religion; the Propriety of this Rule is still farther confirm'd to us; for as he goes on, he shews, that *s* the way to Happiness and the practice of Truth, are co-incident: that to *e* act according to right Reason, and to *e* act according to Truth, are in effect the same thing.—He shews distinctly that Prop. 14. Sect. 3. we are obliged to act according to these: and hence follows, as he says, *e* Rel. of Nat. p. 52. the *e* truest Definition of Natural Religion, viz. That it is The pursuit of Happiness by the practice of Reason and Truth.

As at first the Author settled such a Rule to shew the difference of our Actions, as he thought the most useful and applicable; here we have the great Triad that jointly constitutes an Action good or bad.

Were not this the chief Point to be settled, I shou'd be afraid that I had been too long upon it; but as settling this fairly, goes so far towards answering the Whole, I shall beg to be indulg'd an Observation or two farther on this.

Obf. 1. Truth is propos'd by Mr. *Wollaston* only as a Rule to shew the quality of our Actions; to shew in general whether an Action be good or evil, not to determine how good or how evil such an Action is. By this Rule we may find under what Denomination Actions are to be rank'd, to what Class they

they belong; 'tis not propos'd as a Rule to shew the exact Measure of each evil Action, by fixing precisely the *Degree* of Guilt attending it; the thing wanting (as the Author himself tells us) is *a* some Rule, by comparing Actions with which, it might appear to which kind they respectively belong; and the *Subject* he manages, is the *Distinction* between Good and Evil; 'tis only a general *Criterion*, by the help of which, we may know our Actions asunder; which is enquir'd after; and Actions compared to his Rule, he says, will shew their *Rectitude* or *Obliquity*, that is, whether they are disagreeable to it or not.

a Rel. of
Nat. p. 7.

c ibid. p. 22.

γ ibid.

Obf. 2. Truth may well be used as the sole and sufficient Criterion of our Actions, tho' the moral Character of our Actions do not consist in their relation to Truth alone: Or, Truth singly is a sufficient Rule to shew of what kind our Actions are. For since Happiness and Reason are co-incident with Truth, whatever agrees with this, must agree with the other two; and whatever Action agrees with all these, no Man, I believe, will deny the Character of Good, morally Good, and so *è contrà*. From the strict Alliance and Union of these, either of them is a sufficient Rule to shew what agrees or does not agree with all; either of these singly is a right and complete Rule: If it be enquir'd whether is the more applicable, that is a new Question: Mr. *Wollaston* for his part chuses Truth, and the Reason why he chuses to make use of this, rather than either of the other, may be gathered from what he says, Pages 23, 24.

And now methinks there may be but small Occasion of confuting what is said in the Letter against this Notion of Mr. *Wollaston*, if what has been said here be agreeable to his Notion. Any one by comparing what is there advanced to this Account of the Case, may find the Weakness and Insignificance of that Writer's Objections to it, and the false Grounds of those large Inferences he wou'd draw from it: But as every Reader will not care for so much trouble, it may not be improper to go through that piece, and set a Mark on its Defects, where it is defective.

In my Opinion there is this general Fault runs through it: The Author of the Religion of Nature has laid down his Scheme in the way of Demonstration; his Propositions have a Dependence on each other, and the Truths he asserts, flow from a Connexion of Arguments. Now the way of confuting in this Case, shou'd be either by shewing where there is any Error in the Chain of Argument; or that his last Consequence does not follow from the Propositions, tho' justly connected to each other, that the Sum Total of the particular Reasonings is not rightly cast up. His starting of Difficulties and drawing of Inferences, is an improper Method in this Case; for tho' Truth must always follow from Truth, yet there may be several particular Difficulties raised, and pretended Inferences play'd upon us; these may seem to affect some true and more general Proposition; but they cannot confute it when it is justly established, if they stagger any Man, that only shews his Weakness and shallow In-sight into things. 'Tis certain that the Sun shines when it is Day, tho' so great a dust shou'd be raised about us, that we shou'd not be able to perceive it.

It

It would therefore have been more just in this Gentleman, to shew in what part Mr. Wollaston's Demonstration was defective, much rather, than to raise Difficulties, which prove nothing.

Letter. p. 5. Yet this latter course he has taken, instead of pointing out the incoherence or inefficacy of the Demonstration, he very wisely begins with proving from some scatter'd Passages, that Mr. Wollaston has advanc'd what it is the *Set-Business* of his first Section to demonstrate, and what this Gentleman is pleas'd to call his *Peculiar Notion*. 'Tis said that *he makes the formal Ratio of moral Good and Evil to consist in an Agreement or Disagreement with Truth, any Truth whatever.* He proves farther beyond dispute, that Mr. Wollaston is consistent with himself, and carries this Notion as far into his Book as Page 138.

If *Peculiar Notion* be placed there by way of Contempt, one wou'd think that a sincere Endeavour (and this has all the Marks of such) to determine what wou'd be so useful to Man, as a Criterion to distinguish the quality of his Actions, might deserve better Usage. The Endeavour to fix so useful a Point by a *Peculiar Notion*, is indeed as ridiculous as to continue in that Notion when demonstrated to be just, for the whole length of 138 Pages.

Letter, ibid. This Notion of Mr. Wollaston, it seems, is *his Notion of Morality* (of a Rule to distinguish our moral Actions, it shou'd be perhaps) *by which he makes the formal Ratio of moral Good and Evil, to consist in an Agreement or Disagreement with Truth, any Truth whatever.* How *Formal Ratio* came in here, I cannot well conceive; for this is laid down for a Representation of the 9th Proposition, §. 1. as this must often be referr'd to; I shall here repeat Mr. Wollaston's Words as they stand in his own Book.

Rel. of Nat. p. 20. Every Act of such a Being as is before describ'd, and all those Omissions which interfere with Truth (i.e. deny any Proposition to be true, which is true; or suppose any thing not to be what it is in any regard) are morally Evil: the forbearing such Acts, and the acting in opposition to such Omissions, are morally Good: and when any thing may be either done or not done equally without the Violation of Truth, that thing is indifferent.

I can see nothing here of the *Formal Ratio*, upon the inserting which in his own Sense I suppose all that large Expression and Reasoning in the Letter, of the very *Essence* of moral Good and Evil, consisting in the mere Agreement of our Acts with Truth, are so freely used as following from this Proposition.

As the Writer of the Letter proves, p. 5. that Mr. Wollaston talks consistently with his first Notion very far into his Book, Page 6. he observes that Mr. Wollaston talks very inconsistently with his first Notion very early in his Book; 'tis very hard, methinks, that both these Points shou'd make against him: And how, I beseech you, is it that he talks inconsistently with himself? Why, at first he settles Truth for the Rule of moral Actions, by their Agreement or Disagreement with which, we may know whether our Acts are good or bad? And soon after he shews, that Truth, Happiness and Reason concur in one point, that they must always co-incide in relation

lation to moral Acts, *i. e.* that the best End of our Actions and the true Director of them, can never contradict this Rule, but must run parallel to it, in a strict and constant Union; inasmuch, that *the Nature of moral Good and Evil will consist in a Conformity or Disagreement to Truth, and those things which are co-incident with it, Reason and Happiness.* I appeal to every Reader, whether this be *varying his Notion*, as this Gentleman terms it, or the ready way of strengthening and confirming it beyond dispute. Rel. of Nat. p. 65. Letter. p. 6.

From Mr. Wollaston's mentioning *important Truths, Truths of Weight, &c.* we may fairly understand (it seems) that he wou'd allow that there are Truths of no Importance. That does not seem so naturally to follow; those Expressions will be very proper from a Person who only allows that Truths are of different Weight and different Importance. No Truth which we contradict by any voluntary Act, will be allowed by him to be absolutely of no Importance, tho' of Importance so different, that in some, it may be so small that it will be scarce perceivable. *Tho' to act against Truth* (they are his own Words) *in any Case is wrong; yet the degrees of Guilt varying with the Importance of things, in some Cases the Importance one way or t'other, may be so little, as to render the Crime evanescent, or almost nothing.* Rel. of Nat. p. 31.

In the 7th Page we meet with the former of the two Inferences, which the Author wou'd draw from Mr. Wollaston's Notion. It appears under the form of an Argument; thus: 'If the very Essence of moral Good and Evil lies in the mere Agreement or Disagreement of our Acts with Truth, all Truth must be suppos'd to be moral—'

What! Does Mr. Wollaston then assert, or does it follow from any thing asserted by him, that the very Essence of moral Good and Evil lies in the mere Agreement or Disagreement of our Acts with Truth? So far from it, that, according to him, it must lie as much in the Agreement or Disagreement of our Acts both with Happiness and Reason; all of these he demonstrates to be co-incident: and thus in this Argument Mr. Wollaston is supposed to hold that, the Contradiction of which, he has in form demonstrated.

But even allowing him to hold what, according to his Demonstration, must be impossible; I cannot see how we come at this Consequence. How will it follow from this Principle, that the very Essence of moral Good and Evil, lies in the mere Agreement or Disagreement of our Acts with Truth, that all Truth must be supposed to be moral? Supposing that the quality of our Actions cou'd be measur'd by nothing but by their Relation to Truth, must therefore every Truth be the measure of or be some way concern'd with our Actions? In this there is a Reciprocation never thought of, I believe, by Mr. Wollaston, void of any Foundation from what is said in his Book, and void of any Foundation in the Reason of the Thing.

The other Inference which is pretended to follow from what Mr. Wollaston has advanced, is this, that not only all Truths must be moral, but equally so: Or, in other Words, *All Truths are of themselves of equal Importance, according to his Definition.* Letter. p. 9.

What

What is here call'd Mr. *Wollaston's* Definition, is his ninth Proposition, §. 1. How properly this is so call'd, and how Truths *equally Moral*, and of *equal Importance*, came to be equivalent Terms, need not be here enquired: However justly 'tis express'd, this it seems is his Meaning, That all Truths are of equal Importance, according to Mr. *Wollaston's* ninth Proposition.

Had not this Term of *Definition* been used often in the Letter, and the Place meant by it determin'd there, one might have been very much at a loss to find what it referr'd to in this Case; for of all things, one should not be apt to imagine that *all Truths are taught* to be of *equal Importance* in that Proposition in which we are told, that our *Acts* (the Criterion of which is *Truth*) are morally good and evil, in *different Degrees*; and are not told one word of all Truths being of *equal Importance*.

Rel. of
Nat. p. 21.

On the contrary, Mr. *Wollaston* explains himself at large as to this very Point. 'It may be of Use (says he) to remember, that I have added those Words *in some degree or other*. For neither all evil, nor all good Actions are equal: those Truths which they respect, tho' they are equally true, may comprise Matters of very *different Importance*, or more Truths may be violated one way than another; and then the Crimes committed by the Violation of them, may be *equally* said to be Crimes, but not *equal Crimes*.

These Words in that Proposition, and this Explanation of them, were design'd purposely to obviate any such Mistake as this Gentleman has fallen into. Mr. *Wollaston*, according to his Design, gives a general Rule by which we may determine whether an Action be good or evil; and he adds those Words, to shew that his Rule does not interfere with the Degrees of good and evil in an Action. He just mentions what may be the proper Rule of those also; but as this is beyond his Purpose, he soon returns to the *main Subject*, the *Distinction between moral Good and Evil*.

Rel. of
Nat. p. 22.
Letter,
p. 11.

This Gentleman owns, that Mr. *Wollaston* often speaks of Truths of Importance, &c. But as he has not put it into his Definition, and seems only incidentally to talk of it, no one, he thinks, should consider it as having any thing to do with his Definition.

Rel. of
Nat. p. 21.

If by this be meant, that the Word *Importance* is not in that Proposition, so far this is true, and no further; for what is put into this Proposition, chiefly concerns this very thing, the Importance of Truths. We are told in it, that Acts are morally good and evil *in different Degrees*; and in the immediate Explanation, this Difference is declared primarily to rely on the different *Importance of Truths*; in the different importance and number of Truths violated or asserted.

And this was so evident, that the Writer of the Letter doubles on this very Point. For as we are told, Page 10. That Mr. *Wollaston* has not put any thing concerning the different Importance of Truths, into his Definition of moral Good and Evil: Page 12, we are told, 'Tis true, the Author has put into that Definition a qualifying Word or two.— This qualifying Word

or

or two which is own'd to be inserted, is the very same, in effect, with what we are told is entirely omitted in the Definition.

But whatever Mr. *Wollaston* has said in his *Definition of moral Good and Evil*, or whatever he asserts against the Equality of all evil or all good Actions, 'tis certain, that the Equality of them follows from his Criterion. Why? Because, properly speaking, there are no Degrees of agreement or disagreement with Truth: for no Action can do more than either assert or deny a Truth, &c. Here (upon the Author of the Letter his confounding the general Rule, to distinguish Acts in their respective Kinds, and the Rule of the Degree of Guilt in particular Actions) we meet with such a run of wretched quibbling, that I have no Humour to transcribe it all: *Vid. Pages 13, 14.* Part of what is there said, may be clear'd by any one who will not confound in his Mind these two distinct Rules; the rest may be confuted by a single Distinction in Mr. *Wollaston's* Book, which, that Author says, may serve for an Answer to some old Fellows that argued very childishly for an equality of all Crimes.

Among other Things, this Gentleman says, *That Mr. Wollaston tells us quite thro' his Book, that the very Idea, the formal Ratio of moral Evil, lies in denying a Thing to be what it is.* What Mr. *Wollaston* is here said to tell us quite thro' his Book, I remember but in one Page in it: However, What is it that is to be collected from hence? that all Crimes are equal? or, that all evil Actions, as such, are contrary to Truth? Tho' all evil Actions agree in being Crimes, must they therefore be all Criminal in the same Degree?

Where Mr. *Wollaston* has made use of such Words as *the Nature, the Idea, or the formal Ratio*, in respect of moral Good and Evil, we ought to consider, that such Expressions are frequently apply'd to Actions, not in a Sense so strict as when they relate to real Beings: they are used often of the former, but then it is in a metaphorical and looser Way. But supposing that it followed from these Expressions, or any Thing else said in *the Religion of Nature*, that the Nature of moral Good or Evil consisted merely in the agreement or disagreement of our Actions with Truth; it will by no means follow, that all Crimes are equal. I suppose the Writer of the Letter will allow, that the Idea and formal Ratio of Error consists merely in the disagreement of our Thoughts with Truth, and will not allow the parity of all Errors; yet if his Reasoning is good in one Case, it will be so in the other, and prove all Errors equal: If he will defend such a Consequence, he must condemn all Mankind for talking absurdly when they speak of a great or small Error, which is a common, and, I think, proper way of speaking. *Rel. of Nat. p. 21. Note, d.*

When an Action is found to be Evil in that it interferes with Truth, how criminal the Action is, may be judged of by the Importance of the Truth, or Truths deny'd. When any one has clearly discover'd the first, it is certain the Action is evil: tho' the Case may be so perplexed, that he could not precisely determine the Degree of Guilt arising from it. Yet it seems to be argued in the Letter, that if the Importance of Truth be the

Letter, p. 15. proper Measure of this, as Mr. Wollaston has not given us the Rules by which the Importance of Truths ought to be measured, his Rule is defective, i. e. a general Rule is not good, unless all the particular Rules under it are specified; or a Foot is not the Measure of what is or is not a Foot in length, unless it has the distinct Inches mark'd upon it.

And with this, will that wise Remark, and all the deep Thought shown in Page 15, be entirely lost. Had he really attempted this (says the Writer of the Letter) I know not whether we should ever have seen his Book at all; at least I am sure it would have been thrown into a quite different Form, &c. And had this Gentleman really consider'd this single Point justly and distinctly, I know not whether we should ever have seen his Book at all.

Page 16, Our Writer desires to be indulged a Parenthesis; and I think he is very much in the Right for it: The kindest way of treating that Passage is using it like a Parenthesis, to pass it by, or read it as negligently as possible. 'Tis very good what he advises in it, That the Title of Mr. Wollaston's Book should be chang'd from *The Religion of Nature delineated*, to the *Nature of moral Evil delineated*, i. e. Part of one Particular in the Book, ought to give the Title to the Whole. And for the same Reason, every just Treatise on the Religion of Nature (for in each the natural Difference of our Actions should be shown) ought to be term'd, *A Treatise on the Nature of moral Evil*.

But to indulge the Author this Parenthesis, we may proceed to the only things which remain unanswer'd, viz. The Cases which he puts against Mr. Wollaston's Notion, and his Observations on Mr. Wollaston's Answer to the Cases by him suppos'd.

All the Cases put by the Letter-writer, are founded on the Inferences which he supposes to follow from Mr. Wollaston's Notion; and as that Supposition is entirely false, we might with good Reason neglect the Cases which are built on it. However, tho' I am no great Casuist, and what is already said might be sufficient, I shall endeavour to shew gratis, That his Cases may be all resolv'd by Mr. Wollaston's Rule, and I shall consider them only as they relate to that.

Case 1. Suppose I take a Pen which is four Inches in length to be but three, and yet assert it to be four, I assert what is true, and so am free from any Immorality, according to Mr. Wollaston; and yet all the World, and my own Conscience, would tell me I am guilty.

Letter, p. 8. *real Truth*, as that Expression is meant in the Letter) it interferes with Rel. of Nat. Truth in another. It interferes with this true Proposition, *That I take this Pen to be but three Inches in length*. And Mr. Wollaston expressly says, *That when he speaks of Acts inconsistent with Truth, he means any Truth, any true Proposition whatever*. According to him then, this Act will be morally evil. 2. If I offend against Truth out of meer Idleness, in this Case, without any End propos'd, without any Design in the World, this will be acting not as a rational Creature: If with Design, this Case will fall under Mr. Wollaston's sixth Proposition, and is a great Instance of partial Thinking.

If

If I assert such a Thing to be otherwise than I imagine, to deceive any Person (as I suppose this Gentleman means, by his adding that *all the World and my own Conscience would tell me I am guilty*) then I do not use that Person according to what *he is* ; and consequently my Action interferes with Truth in that also.

This Gentleman draws a Corollary from this Case, which has at least the Air of a Paradox: viz. *A Lye, in multitudes of Instances, is not any violation of Truth.* We may judge from this, how strictly proper his Idea of a Lye is; at least, how well he has weigh'd what he says here: For, according to his own account in that very Place, there cannot be a Lye which does not interfere with *some Truth or other.* Letter, p. 9. p. 8.

Case 2. When I endeavour to prove another Proposition by this false one, That the three Angles of a Triangle are not equal to two Right ones, I consider this Triangle otherwise than it is *entirely*: This Action therefore is *as morally evil*, as when, by an Act of Charity, I refuse to save a Man from starving. Letter, p. 9.

By *as morally evil* here I suppose is meant as criminal, criminal in as high a degree: Now to argue an Equality of guilt in any two Points from their being *entirely* contrary to *some Truth*, is a flat Contradiction of Mr. Wollaston's Scheme. According to him, two Points may be entirely contrary to some Truth, and yet be infinitely (at least indefinitely) unequal Crimes: For the Number of Truths with which the one and the other interferes, may be very different, and the Importance of those Truths infinitely unequal.

Indeed, according to Mr. Wollaston, the Acts compar'd in this Objection may not only be Evil in very different degrees, but the former will not be morally Evil at all. For altho', in that Case, there were something done which interferes with Truth, yet it is not *such an Act* as bears any relation to Mr. Wollaston's Definition of moral Evil: Because no Act is there intended, but what is the Act of a Being perfectly free, free with respect to that very Act which is to be determin'd by it. Now 'tis plain, such an Act as this must be voluntary, which cannot be said in the present Case, without supposing it possible for a Man to desire to be mistaken in Matters of pure Speculation. Letter, p. 11.

Case 3. A. meets B. a poor Wretch at the point of Starving, takes notice of his Case, says every thing that is right about it, and goes his way; C. comes immediately after, sees what B's Case is, gives him relief and departs. Here A's Words and C's Action are suppos'd perfectly to agree with B's Circumstances; and therefore, according to Mr. Wollaston, the moral Goodness of their Acts must be equal.

So far from being *equally good*, according to Mr. Wollaston, that according to him, A. here will be guilty of a criminal Omission, and C's Act will be morally Good. A. by only commiserating B's Case in Words (if he cou'd assist him otherwise) does not use him as a poor Wretch at the point of Starving; he denies his own Nature to be what it is, and by omitting

actual Assistance, he in reality denies *B*'s Case to be what it is, and his own Compassion to be what it is.

Case 4. *D.* meets the Wretch *B.* and denies his Case to be what it is, and calls him a Cheat, tho' he knows to the contrary. *E.* meets with him, and beats him to any degree ; it will be impossible not to find these Persons equally moral, according to our Author.

What is meant by finding these Persons *equally moral*, I confess I do not understand ; but that their Actions are not equally evil, but, according to Mr. *Wollaston*, that they do not offend equally against Truth, I think is very plain : For *E.* in this Case, offends against a greater number of Truths than *D.* *E.* by using the Wretch *B.* thus, denies all the Truths which *D.* denies : beside these, *E.*'s Action asserts to himself a right of judging and punishing *B.* contrary to Truth. *D.*'s Action then is no more equal in guilt to *E.*'s, according to Mr. *Wollaston*'s Notion, than a Part is equal to the Whole.

So much for this Gentleman's Cases, neither of which, I think, will affect our Author's Rule so as to prove it false or inadequate to the Thing propos'd. We shall soon see whether his Observations on what Mr. *Wollaston* has advanced toward obviating Objections, be of greater force. *I would now observe* (says he) *how strangely our Author goes to work with the Objections which he supposes to be made to his 11th Proposition.*

Rel. of Nat. p. 26. The 11th Proposition is this, 'That every intelligent, active, and free Being, should so behave himself, as by no Act to contradict Truth ; or, that he should treat every Thing according to what it is.'

'Tis objected to this, among other Things, that according to this Proposition, *the proper way of using a Creditor, who is a Spendthrift, or one that knows not the use of Money, as such, is not to pay him.* To this Mr. *Wollaston* gives a very satisfactory Answer, and among other things, shews, That this is so far from being a Consequence of the Rule given, that the omitting to pay such a Creditor, would directly break in upon this Rule. And this, he says, *is to be consider'd above all.* Our Author seems to divert himself with this Expression ; puts a Case without any reference to this Proposition, and then desires to know whether the same thing be still to be consider'd above all. Such Behaviour as this, does not want to be expos'd any farther than by barely relating it.

In speaking to Mr. *Wollaston*'s Answer to the next Objection, this Gentleman seems to infer, that if a Wretch cannot get Relief in an honest way, he may be allow'd to get it in a dishonest way, (*in as vulgar a sense of the Word as can be*). Mr. *Wollaston* is of the contrary Opinion, and I cannot yet allow that his Reason for this would be so idle, viz. That Truth ought not to be violated by our Actions, not in any Case however circumstantiated, because it will still be Truth. *Is that the true Reason ? or, Is that any Reason at all ?* Most certainly a Reason, and probably the true Reason ; for when I say we are oblig'd not to act against any Truth as such, 'tis evident that in this Reason I imply my Obligation to act according

according to that Order and those true Relations of things, which the Author and Disposer of things has ordain'd. When I say that I must not act against Truth and the Nature of Things, it implies my Obligation to obey the Author of Nature, the God of Truth. The Obligations to act according to Truth, are laid down very early in Mr. *Wollaston*, so early as Prop. 4. §. 1. Had this Gentleman consider'd the Proof of that Proposition, probably he would not have handled this Point in so idle and ludicrous a manner. But to do him Justice, I believe he did not consider the *Meaning* of the Place; he was laughing only at the Word *Truth*.

Much of the same Nature, is what he says on the same Occasion of the Notion of our being obliged not to rob our Neighbour of his Property, not to take any thing from him that is his, because it is *his*: and is not this then really any Reason? Is it not the immediate Reason for my not doing this? Take it in any Scheme, this *trifling* Reason is the *Substratum* for the whole Obligation. This will appear in the clearest Light, if we lay the *Climax* of Obligation in this Case: I ought not to take such a thing: Why? Because it belongs to some other Person. The Reason of that is, because we are both Creatures fram'd with such and such Faculties, and under such and such Circumstances; the Reason that this obliges, proceeds from the Nature of that Being who fram'd us with such Faculties, and under such Circumstances. The Breach of Property, is the Foundation of the whole Obligation's pressing on me in this Case, 'tis that which makes the Action criminal: had not the thing belong'd to some other, I might take it for my own Use, tho' so fram'd, and fram'd by such a Being.

I cannot but add, that this whole Case is very much harden'd in all its Features. The Objection in Mr. *Wollaston*, originally runs thus, *If I want Money, don't I act according to Truth, if I take it from somebody else to supply my Wants?* The Objection in this Gentleman will run thus, *May not a Man commit a Sin to save his Life.* Mr. *Wollaston* indeed in enlarging upon this Question, carries it in Supposition thus far; and his Answer is, that a Man shou'd not (act against Truth, *i. e.*) sin to save his Life. How this wou'd be answer'd by the Writer of the Letter, we may guess from his manner of handling the Question: if he wou'd speak out, and say, that a Man *may* commit a small Sin to save his Life; with all Submission, I take that to be a Contradiction in Terms, for to say, we may do such a thing, is to call it lawful; and to say, we *may* commit a small Sin, is saying, that such Action is lawful and unlawful at the same time.

We are told, that the Answer to the fourth Objection is yet more Extrava-
gant: more extravagant, I own, the Letter-writer has made it. For he puts the Case differently, and yet uses the old Answer. Were Answers never so fit and justly adapted, as design'd by the Author, what Man of Reason cou'd imagine that they wou'd tally with every Case that may be put for them? It may be ask'd, whether in all Cases a Man be oblig'd to tell the Truth? Mr. *Wollaston* puts a Case, in which, a Man is not oblig'd to tell the Truth; a Case, in which his speaking wou'd be of very ill Consequence, and where his Silence wou'd contradict no Truth. Well, how
must

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Letter, p. 18. must this Answer be made to appear so very extravagant? Nothing in the World is more easy; 'tis only altering the Case so far, that his Silence *wou'd contradict Truth*: confound the Cases, and then the first Answer is absurd.

p. 29.

Mr. *Wollaston* in the same place, makes a Distinction between denying Truth *by Words and by Facts*, and makes the latter the more criminal. Upon this, the Writer of the Letter brings up his old Mistake. *The Guilt of a wicked Deed*, (says he) *has it not been defin'd to lie in denying a Truth?* (the direct contrary.) *And is there not as much of this in a verbal Falshood?* The Guilt then is the same or equal. We may as well say, that Words and Facts are of equal Importance; for the Guilt is as the Importance (as well as Number) of Truths violated; and there is not only a Difference thus, in *Words and Facts*, which contradict Truth: but there may be a great, a very wide Difference between the Guilt of the very *same Words* violating the *very same immediate Truth*. But this is our Writer's old Fault. Indeed, his imagining that the Equality of all Crimes follows from Mr. *Wollaston's* Notion, is the prevailing Error that runs through the Whole of this Piece, tho' without any particular Foundation in this Case. We might as well conclude the Equality of Crimes, when any other thing is pitch'd upon to distinguish our Actions, as when Truth is taken for the Standard of them. Let right Reason be the Rule of moral Good and Evil, may we not as well argue (in this Gentleman's way) that all Actions of either sort must be equal, because no Action can do more, than agree with, or dissent from *Right Reason*? 'Tis just the same if you name *Happiness, Beauty and Pleasure*; or, *the Fitness and Unfitness of things*.

This Mistake of the Writer of the Letter, seems to me to be partly owing to his viewing Mr. *Wollaston's* Rule in a false Light, his considering Truth as one uniform thing in practice: he shou'd have observ'd, that when we talk of *Truth as one*, we mean only a general Name, a mere abstract Idea. *Truth*, as the measure of moral Actions, is manifold, and consists in Particulars. By this Rule, we compare Actions, to the Truth of the Case, which is therefore as various as the Cases may be, or to the Truth of such a Proposition which is founded on such an Action, and is therefore as various as those Propositions may be.

Yet this Gentleman argues, that if the Agreement to Truth be the Rule which constitutes a good Action, then all Actions which agree with Truth, must be equally good. Read *which agree with the most different Truths*, and the Fallacy is apparent. I have repeated this egregious Mistake, as it is the chief Foundation of the Letter; and to speak the Truth, this is as justly advanc'd in the beginning of it, as the *Answers* are totally overthrown in the Conclusion.

Such are the Methods of this Gentleman to *refute* a Notion, digested with much Judgment, and carried on with a great Force and Clearness of Argument. Indeed Mr. *Wollaston's* Genius is so superiour, that this very Gentleman is forc'd to acknowledge it in some very extensive Expressions,

which

which shew at the same time, that he is as awkward at Commending as at Refuting.

In the beginning of his Letter, he gives it as his Opinion, that Mr. Wollaston deserves as much Applause as he has met with, and that is almost as much as he cou'd possibly have. This is the next to the Title-Page, in which we are taught, that Mr. Wollaston's principal Notion (which this Writer takes to be almost the Sum Total of his Book) is entirely false and groundless. In the last Page, except one, we find him again speaking of his Excellencies, and great Reach of Thought; yet in the immediately preceding Pages, 'tis strange that he shou'd be capable of giving so ridiculous an Answer.—The next is yet more extravagant—and the Absurdity he is guilty of, astonishing. Signs these of a Writer, whose Thoughts are not the most coherent and uniform, that refutes and commends by starts, and with an Heat of Imagination inconsistent with Judgment and true Reasoning.

This Gentleman concludes with pointing out to his Reader, two or three particular Defects in the Religion of Nature; I have been too long already to run out on those Heads, against which, he has made no particular Objection; but shall in return beg leave to point out two Passages in his Letter: That I mean, in which we hear of many ingenious and reasonable Men, who have been so unhappy, as to have contracted some Prejudices against all Distinctions of moral Good and Evil; and that other, in which he speaks of St. Austin and a Number of other Persons, who were by chance got into a narrow way of thinking. These possibly may want another Turn of Expression; some Readers may be too apt to draw Inferences from them, to the Author's disadvantage: for to speak of the certain Mistakes of Men, of no Religion, with such an Air of Tendernefs and Compassion, and the supposed Mistakes of Men of much Religion with such an air of Dislike and Contempt, may found but oddly from a Man of any Religion.

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I have but one thing more to observe, which is this: What I here answer, is the Letter, in which Mr. Wollaston's Notion is said to be refuted. As to what has been advanc'd against any thing there said, I shall think myself obliged to defend it, or to retract it as an Error, which I shall very readily do when it is prov'd to be such; but if any thing new and distinct from what is laid down in the Letter, shou'd be started, as I have not Leisure nor Inclination to run on in a growing Dispute, neither shall I think myself at all concern'd in it.

F I N I S.



